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ABSTRACT

A representative sample of 987 entering freshmen (45 percent male and 55 percent female) at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), were surveyed regarding their attitudes and demographic characteristics during two-day summer orientation sessions. The typical UMCP freshman was from an upper-middle class home, earned at least a B average in high school, and was optimistic in his or her expectations of academic and social life at college. The typical freshman planned to live in the university residence halls and expected to become involved in student activities, but did not plan to work during the school year. Thirty-three percent of the students surveyed stated that getting a better job was their main reason for going to college. UMCP in particular was chosen mostly for its good academic reputation (by 29 percent of the students) and its low tuition (14 percent). It was the initial choice of school for most of those surveyed; 55 percent indicated UMCP as their first choice and 24 percent as their second choice. Compared to national norms, the 1980 freshman class at UMCP was similar to entering freshmen at other public universities. A shared concern was their ability to finance their college education. Demographically, the UMCP sample was slightly different from the national sample in that it included somewhat more minority students and was somewhat more affluent. (Author/LBL)

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PROFILE OF 1980 INCOMING FRESHMEN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND COLLEGE PARK.

Alyce Martinez and William E. Sedlacek

Research Report # 2-81

Summary

A representative sample of 987 entering freshmen (45% male and 55% female) at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) were surveyed regarding their attitudes and demographic characteristics during two-day summer orientation sessions.

The typical UMCP freshman was from an upper-middle class home, earned at least a B average in high school, and was optimistic in his or her expectations of academic and social life at college. The typical freshman at UMCP planned to live in the University residence halls and expected to get involved in student activities, but did not plan to work during the school year.

Thirty-three percent of the students surveyed stated that getting a better job was their main reason for going to college. UMCP, in particular, was chosen mostly for its good academic reputation (by 29% of the students) and its low tuition (14%). UMCP was the initial choice of school for most of those surveyed, 55% indicated UMCP as their first choice and 24% as their second choice.

Compared to national norms, the 1980 freshman class at UMCP was similar to entering freshmen at other public universities. Like UMCP students, freshmen nationally tended to be optimistic about their future and cited similar reasons for choosing their particular school. A shared concern, however, was their ability to finance their college education. Demographically, the UMCP sample was slightly different from the national sample in that it included somewhat more minority students and was somewhat more affluent.

Each year the University New Student Census (UNSC) is administered to a representative sample of entering freshmen who attend a two-day summer orientation program at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP). The descriptive data in this report is based on the Fall, 1980 freshman class; in some cases percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding or "other" responses to some items.

General Description

The 1980 sample cosisted of 987 entering freshmen, 45% males and 55% females. The mean SAT scores for the total class was 965 total, SAT-VERBAL = 456 and SAT-MATH = 510.

The sample was 82% white, 11% black, 3% Oriental and 3% Hispanic. The religious affiliation of students was 30% Catholic, 22% Protestant, 19% Jewish, 14% other, and 13% none. Although only one percent of the total sample described themselves as physically handicapped, 18% of these students reported they had experienced some loss of sight, 20% indicated that they were legally blind, 3% had some loss of hearing, and 3% reported a speech difficulty. A handicap requiring the use of a wheelchair was indicated by three students in the survey.

Compared to 1979 national norms for all freshmen (Astin, King, & Richardson, 1979), UMCP students surveyed were relatively more affluent than students at other public universities.

The median family income in the Astin sample was about $25,380, while the median family income in the UMCP sample was $32,475. A full 25% of the UMCP sample reported that they did not know their parents' income, however.

The majority (59%) expected to be living in the University residence halls, 26% with their parents or other relatives, 5% planned to share a house or apartment, 2% planned on living in a fraternity or sorority, another 2% in a

room in a private house and 1% planned to live alone in an apartment. Although most students would be living on-campus, 17% of those living off-campus would be within 10 miles of the University and 14% would be living between 10 and 50 miles from campus.

When asked what contributed most to their development during the past year, 20% of the students cited job experience, 20% cited social life, 19% said new friendships made, while others cited activities related to school (7% said course work, 7% said independent study or research, and 6% said contact with teachers and counselors).

Students in the Behavioral and Social Sciences were most likely to cite job experience, as were students in the Mathematical and Physical Sciences and Engineering division (compared to all other divisions). Social life was most often cited by students in General Studies, Human and Community Resources and Allied Health, who also selected friendships made. Friendships made was also chosen by Human and Community Resources and Mathematical and Physical Sciences and Engineering students. Course work was most often selected as most important by Allied Health and Agricultural and Life Sciences students, compared to all other divisions (see Table 1).

More than one-third of the sample (40%) graduated from a high school class of 300-499, 23% from a class of 100-299, and 20% from a class of 500-699. Eight percent graduated in a class of between 700 and 899, 4% had a class of 900 or more and 3% had fewer than 100 classmates in their graduating class. When asked how they ranked in their graduating class, one-third of the freshmen indicated that they were in the top 25% of their class, 30% were in the top 10%, and 29% said in the upper half of the class. Only 5% indicated that they ranked in the lower half of their graduating classes. In terms of grades, over two-thirds of the students (68%) earned a B average in high school, 17% had an A or A+ average, and 14% had a C average; overall, females earned higher grades than males.

View of UMCP

Going to college seemed to be important to the students in the survey, only 14% indicated that they had ever seriously considered not going. But their reasons for attending were diverse: Getting a better job was the main reason for going to college, according to 33% of the freshmen surveyed, particularly for Mathematical and Physical Sciences and Engineering students (49%). Other reasons cited for attending college included gaining a general education (17%), preparing for graduate school (13%), and learning more about things (11%). Five percent of the sample indicated that they simply wanted to make more money.

When asked why they chose UMCP in particular, the largest percentage (29%) cited UMCP's good academic reputation, particularly students in Allied Health. Low tuition was the reason chosed by 14%, 7% chose UMCP because they wanted to live at home, 7% because of advice from a former student/friend, 4% cited special educational programs, 4% said it was due to a relative's wishes, another 4% were not accepted elsewhere, and 28% of the sample cited "other" reasons. UMCP was the initial choice of school for most of those surveyed, with 55% of students indicating that UMCP was their first choice of colleges and 24% indicating UMCP as their second choice. Only 3% reported that UMCP was their last choice of schools.

The freshmen surveyed indicated that their knowledge of UMCP stemmed mostly from visits to campus (41%) and University publications such as the campus catalog (21%). College guides such as Lovejoy's or Barron's accounted for approximately 6% of the freshmen's knowledge of the campus, while 3% of the students reported that most of their knowledge of UMCP was from the media (TV, radio, or newspapers).

Almost one-third of the freshmen (32%) stated that their parents were most influential in their decision to attend UMCP. Other influential persons included other family members (11%), University students (10%), high school students (5%), and high school staff (4%).

Academic Plans and Expectations

Thirty-seven percent of the freshmen sample expect that the highest degree they would obtain would be a bachelor's, 33% planned to go on for a master's degree, 10% for a doctorate, 9% for a medical degree and 5% planned on a law degree.

One item on the UNSC confronted students with the statistic that nationally about half of all university students leave before receiving a degree, and asked them to speculate about possible reasons why they might leave school. Twenty-eight percent of the UMCP freshmen said they were absolutely certain that they would receive a degree, while 29% speculated that they might leave for financial reasons (16% said that their college education might cost more than they or their families could afford and 13% indicated they might leave to accept a good job), and 23% speculated that they might leave for academic reasons (14% for lack of scholastic ability or insufficient academic skills, and 9% because of disinterest in studies). Interestingly, 9% of the females (but no males) thought they might leave because of marriage.

Students were largely optimistic in their expectations regarding their academic life at UMCP. Over two-thirds (67%) of the respondents felt that channels for expressing their complaints would be readily available and that their courses would be stimulating and exciting (68%), with females being somewhat more likely to endorse the latter statement (75% females vs. 60% males). Thirty-six percent of the freshmen expected that their instructors would care about students, but 41% were unsure. In terms of adjustment to

college life, 45% expected to have a hard time adjusting to academic work (31% were unsure) but only 15% expected to have a hard time adjusting to the social life of college (with 27% being unsure).

In terms of the relative importance of grades, 59% disagreed with the statement "Getting a good grade in a course is more important to me than learning the content of the course (25% were unsure and 16% agreed), but 71% thought that most high school students would cheat on an exam if they thought they wouldn't be caught (18% were neutral, 11% disagreed).

In terms of economic expectations, about half (49%) of the students were worried about their ability to finance their college education despite the relative affluence of the sample compared to students at other public universities.

Activities

Over half (53%) of the respondents indicated that they planned to become involved in one or more campus activities, while 22% said that they didn't plan to be active on campus because they would need the time for studying. Compared to all other divisions, Agricultural & Life Sciences and Mathematical and Physical Sciences & Engineering majors were most likely to feel they needed the time for study (27% and 26%, respectively) and Arts & Humanities students and Allied Health students (65% and 64%) were most likely to state that they wanted to get involved in student activities. Overall, females were more likely to want to become involved than males (females 60%, males 45%).

Three-fourths (76%) of the students said they wanted to join campus clubs and groups, but only 18% expected to become involved in religious activities on campus.

With reference to sports and athletics, 44% of the freshmen agreed with the statement "I closely follow one or more UMCP athletic teams" while 25% were

unsure and 31% disagreed. Not surprisingly, males were more likely than females to endorse this item (53% males vs. 36% females). The majority (59%) of students expected to participate in intramural sports, with 24% unsure and only 17% disagreeing. Again, more males than females endorsed this item (67% males vs. 53% females).

Study Habits and Skills

In reporting their study habits during high school, 25% of the sample reported studying 1-3 hours per week, 23% 4-5 hours per week, 17% between 6 and 8 hours weekly, 13% 9-12 hours, and 9% reported studying between 13 and 17 hours per week. Twenty-nine percent reported that 50% of their study time was crammed and 50% was done systematically ahead of time. Twenty-four percent stated that their cram/systematic study ratio was 70%/30%, and 23% utilized a 30%/70% ratio of study time. Only 7% did all of their studying systematically ahead of time and 14% nearly always crammed to meet deadlines. Over one-third of the students (35%) usually keep up with their reading assignments, 25% were sometimes behind in their assignments, and 20% almost always keep up with their work. Only 6% were almost always behind in reading assignments.

Math and study skills were most often cited as the weakest academic areas for students, with 22% specifying each. Writing was the weakest area for 15% of the students, science courses for 13%, reading for 9%, taking exams for 6%, and note-taking for another 6%. There were sex differences on this item, with females more likely to cite math and science courses as being problems, while males were more likely to have problems with note-taking, writing, and study habits. When analyzed by division, math was the weakest area for students in Arts & Humanities, Human & Community Resources, and Allied Health. In general, students in the sciences reported that their weakest areas were writing, note-taking, and study habits. Interestingly, although only 15% stated that writing

was their weakest area and only 27% agreed with the statement "It is difficult for me to write papers," 87% of the respondents indicated an interest in improving their writing skills. Spelling skills were also seen as an area needing improvement, with 67% of the freshmen indicating such an interest. In terms of non-academic skills students would most like to improve, 28% chose speaking before a group, 19% chose being more assertive and 16% chose being more socially skilled.

Use of Services

Regarding counseling services, 65% were interested in seeking counseling for their educational-vocational plans, 26% were unsure, and only 10% disagreed. A smaller percentage of students were interested in counseling for emotional or social concerns (18%), with a large percentage being unsure or not interested (41% each). Those who did express an interest in emotional/social counseling were most likely to be from the Behavioral and Social Sciences division (compared to all other divisions).

In terms of contraception services, 22% agreed with the statement "I expect to use the University Health Center for birth control information," 33% disagreed, and 43% were unsure. Interestingly, compared to all other divisions, students in Allied Health were most likely to disagree with that statement. Females were only slightly more likely to agree or disagree with the statement, while males were more likely to be unsure (47% males vs. 40% females).

Social Concerns

UMCP students were largely non-committal or unsure about social issues such as institutional racism, the role of the State of Maryland in funding education, and the University's role in improving social conditions. The

majority (63%) of students responded that they "don't know" why there are few blacks at UMCP, 16% speculated that blacks prefer to go to black colleges, 6% said the University's racist image discourages blacks, 3% said the university's tough reputation discourages them, and 1% believed that the university's racist practices discourages blacks from coming to UMCP. When it comes to actively recruiting black students, the majority (51%) were neutral, with 21% agreeing that the University should recruit blacks and 28% disagreeing.

Students were also unsure about the University's role in solving social problems: 49% were neutral when asked to agree or disagree with the statement "The university should use its influence to improve social conditions in the State" (thirty-eight percent agreed with that item and 12% disagreed).
The respondents were quite idealistic regarding the State of Maryland's rank with regard to per capita funding for higher education compared to other states. Twenty-eight percent incorrectly thought Maryland was among the top 10 states supporting higher education, 23% thought Maryland was among the next 10 states, 23% believed Maryland to be above average and 6% guessed that Maryland was slightly below average. No students correctly perceived that Maryland is among the 10 states <u>least</u> supporting higher education.

Students were somewhat more opinionated on issues that more directly would influence their lives. For example, 42% of the respondents believed that living together before marriage is all right, while 18% disagreed. Almost a third (30%) were still neutral, however. Forty-six percent favored the U.S. boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics, 29% did not and 24% remained unsure. Students were about evenly split on the item "I favor resumption of draft registration even though I may one day face conscription as a result," with 30% agreeing, 31% disagreeing, and 28% remaining neutral. But the majority (54%) favored drafting women for non-combat roles in the U.S. military, with 23%

disagreeing and 21% unsure. Males were more likely to strongly agree on the resumption of the draft (18% males vs. 7% females) and also strongly favor the drafting of women (33% males vs. 17% females).

Work Experience

In terms of unpaid work, over half (52%) of the students surveyed had had experience doing volunteer work, particularly females (58% females vs. 46% males).

Most students (53%) did not plan to work during their first year at UMCP; while 24% plan to work at off-campus jobs, 5% will work in federally-funded work study programs on-campus,and 9% will do other on-campus work.

Over one-third (35%) earned between $1,000 and $3,000 last year, 22% earned between $500 and $999, 18% earned between $100 and $499, and 10% made more than $3,000 in the last year. Only 7% had not earned any money within the past year.

Careers

When asked what was most important in their long-term career choice, 21% of the freshmen chose intrinsic interest in the field, 14% cited high anticipated earnings, 13% specified work with people, 8% said job openings usually available, 7% chose rapid career advancement possibilities and another 7% chose a well-respected or prestigious occupation. Nine percent stated that they had not yet made a career choice. Analysis by divisions shows that students in Agriculture and Life Sciences chose their careers due to an intrinsic interest in the field, while Mathematical and Physical Sciences and Engineering students look forward to job availabilities and to rapid advancement as well as high earnings. Behavioral & Social Sciences students seek career advancement, but also seek high-prestige occupations. Arts &

Humanities students desire to work with ideas, while students in the division of Human & Community Resources want to work with people and expect jobs to be readily available. Allied Health students also sought their careers due to an interest in working with people, while students in General Studies were most likely to indicate they had not yet made a career choice (see Table 2).

In terms of non-traditional careers, females were more likely to have explored and to have been supported for exploring non-traditional careers than were males. About 28% of the respondents had talked to people in non-traditional careers (such as women engineers, male nurses, etc.), of these, 33% were female and 21% were male. During high school, 36% of the students were encouraged to explore non-traditional interests and activities, and of these, 48% were female and 23% were male. For the 33% who felt they were not encouraged to explore non-traditional activities, and male/female percentages were almost reversed (42% males and 24% females). Two-thirds of all respondents (66%) stated that their families would be supportive if they chose a non-traditional career, but again more of these were females (89%) than males (50%).

On an item which said: "It's OK for a woman to work outside the home as long as she continues to assume her primary responsibilities of home and child care," 64% agreed, 10% disagreed, and 22% were neutral. Males were more likely to be neutral on this item than were females (27% males vs. 18% females), while females were more likely to either strongly agree (29% females vs. 21% males) or strongly disagree (6% females vs. 3% males).

Comparison to National Norms

The 1980 freshman class at UMCP is similar in most ways to national norms of 1979 entering freshmen at other public universities. Based on data collected through the American Council on Education by Astin et. al. (1979), these similarities extend from demographic characteristics to attitudes and expectations about college.

For example, students nationwide agreed with UMCP freshmen that getting a better job and getting an education were the most important reasons for deciding to go to college. Most students also agreed that they chose their particular school because of its academic reputation (57% nationally). Freshmen nationwide were generally optimistic about their future. Like UMCP students, they expected to be satisfied with college, to get their degree, and to find a job in their preferred field. Few expected to transfer to another college or to drop out for any reason. One concern, however, that was expressed involved the cost of higher education. Over half (53%) of the national sample indicated that financing their college education was of some concern to them, and 14% indicated that it was a major concern. In the UMCP sample about half (49%) expressed concern about this same issue.

Slight differences between the UMCP sample and the national norms occurred only in terms of two demographic variables. Although the UMCP and national samples are both predominantly white (82% UMCP vs. 92% nationally), there are slightly more minority students at UMCP. Black students comprised about 6% of the students in public universities nationwide, compared to 11% in the UMCP sample. There were also slightly more Asians and Hispanics at UMCP (3% vs. 1% nationally). These differences may in part be due to the large black and foreign diplomatic population in the greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, of which UMCP is a part.

Geographic promixity to Washington, D.C. may also account for the relatively greater affluence of the UMCP sample, discussed earlier, due to the large number of workers employed by the federal government residing in suburban Maryland.

References

Astin, A.W., King, M.R., and Richardson, G.T. The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1979. Los Angeles: Cooperative Institutional Research Program of the University of California, Los Angeles and the American Council on Education, 1979.

Table 1

Item 14: Which one of the following contributed most to your own development during the past year?

		all freshmen %	1st Choice by Division
1.	Social life (dating, parties, etc.)	20	Human & Community Resources General Studies
2.	Job Experience	20	Behavioral & Social Sciences Arts & Humanities
3.	Friendships made	19	All
4.	Course work	7	Agricultural & Life Sciences Allied Health
5.	Independent study/research	7	Arts & Humanities
6.	Contact with teachers/counselors	6	Allied Health

Table

Table 2

Item 23: Which of the following is most important in your long-term career choice?

	all freshmen %	Division
Intrinsic interest in the field	21	Agricultural & Life Sciences
Work with people	13	Human & Community Resources; Allied Health
High anticipated earnings	14	Behavioral & Social Sciences; Mathematical & Physical Sciences & Engineering
Job openings	8	Mathematical & Physical Sciences & Engineering
Rapid career advancement possible	7	Mathematical & Physical Sciences & Engineering Behavioral & Social Sciences
Well-respected, prestigious occupation	7	Behavioral & Social Sciences
Work with ideas	5	Arts & Humanities
No career choice	9	General Studies